

## **Fred Terrell**

### **Talk he gave at the Coupeville Library**

**May 20, 1999**

Fred's topic was the Admiralty Head Lighthouse, but he talked a lot about other stuff, like navigation and why the light was needed.

"In 1849, in the old newspapers, they had back in those days, one sheet worth, came out with big bold letters, three words, "Gold In California," and you all know the story of the gold rush. People literally dropped what they were doing, sold the farm or whatever they could get for a wagon and a couple of oxen and they started this trek west."

He tells about the good and bad and all of a sudden there were lots of people, but little gold.

"So, what are we going to do now. The problem that unemployed people had in those days is that they had to do something and there happened to be several sailing ships in the Port of San Francisco that were doing a nice business. People in California, who had money now were building homes and buildings and wharves but they had no wood. Those sailing ship captains, came up here, with empty holds to come to the little villages of Seattle and Olympia, Bellingham and take the logs and sail back to California. They were making good money.

Some of the Captains got together and said 'hey.' All we have to do is take some settlers up there. There's nothing up there to support them so we can make some money with these settlers because they're going to have to buy sugar, flour, candles, gun powder, hardware, tools, everything has got to come from us because there's no one up there to supply them. And that is essentially how so many people started coming up here in the 1850s."

Fred shows a chart and talks about the problems of coming into the Straits at night.

"The sailing ships would lay to in this area (entrance to the Straits of Juan de Fuca) until day break. As soon as day broke, they would sail in through here. Why couldn't they sail in before? They couldn't see that entrance. And they were fearful of going much further north because, after all, Vancouver Island juts well out into the Pacific. So at day break, they'd round this corner and start sailing east. The problem was by the time they got in this area here, they were only making about five knots and this was a 90 mile trip. Their objective, of course, is to go through Admiralty Inlet into Puget Sound. That's the only way to get into Puget Sound, through that three and one half mile inlet. And those skippers said that at night time, it's like threading a needle up there on the bridge of the ship. To those sailing ships, these were treacherous waters."

He talks about currents and the need for a lighthouse at Admiralty Head.

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"It is really quite remarkable that from what they were doing and eking out a survival here, that the first light house was lighted in 1861, just eleven years after the first man, European, put his foot on this Island."

Note: Not quite true. The Island was first homesteaded in 1850, but Ebey wasn't the first white on the island.

"Eleven years latter, we had a lighthouse, right down where the big guns are. The people on this island must have gotten together with the folks over at Port Townsend because Point Wilson light was built about the same time. Having the light house here was really the first big enhancement to navigation in these waters."

He talks about the lights themselves.

"Dr. Augustine Fresnel, in Paris, concocted this thing, some of them are still in use today. They had four feet of that, 500 pounds of copper, brass and crystal to put in a lighthouse? You bet it took all of that. Particularly in those early days because it was a job being a lighthouse keeper, I mean, a real tough job. He only had a whale oil lamp, that's all he had and that oil lamp, if I put one out here on the grass and walked away from it, maybe I could still see it at a half mile but probably not on a dark night, I mean it's that dim a light and it smoked like crazy, just terrible smoky lamp. That fresnel lens, made up of rows of crystal prisms that refracted the light, was able to really do all this refraction by bending all that light energy, almost all that light, into a now horizontal beam that went out to where the ships were. Instead of a half a mile, you could see that dim little light with a magnification then, the refraction, from that lens, you could see that light for three and a half miles. That was really something to have that capability.

The light rotates, it rotates all night long. In those days, we didn't have an electrical motor sitting underneath it. But that dude rotated all night long. They had a grandfather clock mechanism. I've only seen pictures of them. Some of the main gears on these things were about like so and instead of a little weight that weighs three or four pounds on a grandfather clock, this was 60 pounds. It was no more than five inches. We know it's a little less than five inches because of the five inch hole in the bottom of the tower of the light house that this weight went through. It didn't bottom out until it got down to the basement. Every hour and a quarter to hour and a half, he had to raise this.

Neat story. One night the lighthouse keeper was quite ill and he just couldn't get up to the thing and he had a five year old son whose mother had him go up quickly and raise the weight. Well, this 55 pound kid was trying to raise a 60 pound weight and that's hard and so he went back to get his sister who was eight or nine years old and she was no volunteer. She wasn't going to get out of her and a lot of fussing and scrambling and finally the two of them went down and raised the weight and they knew enough, they had watched their father and clean those crystals. Those crystals were really clotted up with that whale oil and thank goodness, it wasn't to long before kerosene came into being because it was much cleaner and a much brighter light."

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"The rotation on that light was one rotation every 70 seconds and the rows of crystals, five rows of crystals, each row, produced a flash, seven seconds later, a flash, five flashes in 35 seconds. Nothing for 35 seconds. So the light signature on the Admiralty Head light was flashing five times in 35 seconds and off for 35 seconds, all night long. Every light house has to be different from all the others in that region. The Lighthouse Service was trying to keep like signatures at least two hundred miles apart. Point Wilson light was a flash, flash, long. That long lasted maybe three or four seconds and then it repeated itself every 15 seconds.

The funding of this light house came from the Lighthouse Service. It was a bureau. It was a very big bureau, back in those days, and they did it with tax money. It was a big thing. This lighthouse that you see here was----when the first light house was destroyed in a storm, half destroyed in a storm, that became another story. The first light house, sitting down there, and was built in 1861 and something like about 1880-81, the Corps of Engineers sent a survey party out from the east coast to come out here because these settlers were complaining bitterly about being unprotected and the vogue of the day, the way countries protect themselves were coastal forts and they say yes, we're going to build a coastal fort. Well, the coastal fort was authorized about 1858 or something like that, by congress, but they didn't appropriate any money. You've heard that story before. And what happened next is that the Civil War came and nothing happened. Early in the 1880s, the Corps of Engineers sent the survey team out and the lighthouse keeper saw these soldiers run with their surveying instruments. The Captain in charge of it knocked on the lighthouse door and said "hey, you're going to have to move this lighthouse because we're going to build a fort here." He told this captain, 'you fellers come on up with me.' And he took them all the way up to the tower. 'Would you look out here, as far as you can see? Land, all land, look up to the north, land as far as you can see. Now you fellers go back to Washington and build your fort somewhere else because this lighthouse is where the lighthouse is.' But he lost.

This one was made out of brick and let me tell you something, this is some kind of construction, 18 inch brick exterior walls with a little stucco on the side. Designed by a German and the Lighthouse Service tried for several years to get someone to come and build this thing. Finally, the German architect said I'll build it. So he came out here and that new lighthouse was built simultaneously with the fort and he practically built the thing single handedly because he didn't bring a team with him he paid soldiers to help him part time."

Q-----Where was the original----that wasn't the original?

"No, it wasn't. The original, the best that we can figure out by looking at photography was about where these big guns are today, the two ten inch guns that came back from the Philippines. The reason why this lighthouse was extinguished so soon is the steamship came along. In 1921, about, this lighthouse was extinguished and has never been lighted since."

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*IT was 1922  
Lenses  
removed in  
1927*  
Roger's note-----Not sure, but I thought there was info that the light was discontinued in 1927. One of the reasons for closing it was (good story, probably not true) the general in charge was influential in it's abandonment. The gun emplacements were pretty well hidden and he did not like having the lighthouse there to guide the enemy, day and night, to their exact location.

Roger's note-----My grandfather, John LeSourd hauled gravel, using his wagon and team of horses, to the construction sight (lighthouse).

More Roger's note-----I did not type the entire text, just the part that was of interest to our maritime history.